



National Volunteer Fire Council

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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SPACE
OF THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
ON
THE NEEDS OF AMERICA'S FIRE SERVICE
OCTOBER 11, 2001
BY
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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
DELAWARE VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION
ON BEHALF OF
THE NATIONAL VOLUNTEER FIRE COUNCIL**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is James E. Turner, III. I am testifying today on behalf of the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC). I serve as the Executive Secretary of the Delaware Volunteer Firemen's Association. The organization is composed of 60 community based volunteer fire, rescue, Emergency Medical Service (EMS), and specialty teams providing special rescue and Hazardous materials response capabilities to the citizens of Delaware. The Association also has four associate members. Wilmington Fire Department, a career fire department protecting Wilmington, Dover Air Force Base and Delaware Air National Guard Fire Departments, the fire protection services providing initial fire & rescue protection to the airman, and resources at those two facilities and a volunteer rescue squad which provides volunteer EMS service to their local community. I am also an active firefighter in the Clayton Fire Company in Clayton, Delaware. I have served as a volunteer firefighter for 35 years and served as a Chief Officer in that Department. My previous vocation was the Emergency Service Training Administrator at the Delaware State Fire School for 25 years. The Director of the Fire School was an appointee of the original commission the report

“America Burning.” This report was submitted to Congress, which resulted in many fire and life safety changes and improvements in America, including fire safety education, the smoke detectors we use in our homes, and the establishment of the National Fire Academy. I have had experiences in all phases of the first responder community, including chemical and hazardous materials incidents, information management, EMS, rescue and fire.

On behalf of the volunteer fire service, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the needs of America’s volunteer fire service in the wake of the September 11th tragedies in New York, Arlington, Virginia and Southwestern Pennsylvania. America’s fire and emergency services are in need of your assistance and you, as Members of Congress, can make a difference by partnering with the fire service to give America’s domestic defenders the tools they need to help fight this new war.

The NVFC represents the interests of the nation's more than 800,000 volunteer firefighters, who staff America's 28,000 volunteer fire departments located in every state of the Union. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), nearly 75% of all firefighters are volunteers. More than half of the approximately one hundred firefighters that are killed each year in the line of duty are volunteers. In addition to the obvious contribution that volunteer firefighters lend to their communities as the first arriving domestic defenders, these brave men and women represent a significant cost saving to taxpayers. According to the September 2001 study by the State Auditor of my home state of Delaware, the volunteer fire service in Delaware saves taxpayers more than \$121,044,900 this fiscal year alone. A copy of this report is have been submitted to be included in the record.

September 11, 2001 is a date that will be long remembered for the horrible losses our nation suffered, including the loss of so many of our brothers and sisters in the emergency services. September 11th will also be remembered for the heroics of those brave men and women who ran into the World Trade Center to render aid to their fellow New Yorkers, those who valiantly fought the raging fire at the Pentagon in Arlington, VA, and the fire companies who responded to the Somerset County, PA plane crash. Volunteer fire, rescue, EMS, and technical specialty teams answered and responded to our Fire Service mottoes of “We go where duty calls” and “Service to Others” on that fateful day at Somerset and the Pentagon incidents. Finally, September 11th will be remembered for ushering in America’s new all out war against terrorism at home and abroad.

As you know, this past weekend, America and our Allies have started to respond militarily against the terrorists. Administration officials and Members of Congress have warned our citizens of a "clear and present danger" of follow-up terrorist attacks. The question now is “when and where will the next terrorist attack occur,” not “if a terrorist attack will occur.” As America’s domestic first responders, the fire service will be on the front lines of any incident and must be prepared to respond to and defend our citizens from the ravages of terrorist attacks using conventional weapons or weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This expands our normal services beyond providing the quick, safe, and competent delivery of fire, EMS, rescue, and technical specialty services to our citizens. Services that already have necessary time and training commitments that are escalating annually.

As I stated earlier, America’s fire service is in need of your assistance and your partnership. Congress and the administration must provide the funding needed to train and equip our firefighters so they can more

effectively and more safely respond to all emergencies, including the inevitability of future terrorist attacks. We now transmit our personal 911 call to you for your help and support in making our jobs and the protection of our citizens safer.

One of the largest problems faced by America's volunteer fire service is funding. Many volunteer fire departments struggle to provide their members with adequate protective clothing, safety devices and training to protect their communities, as mandated by regulations and standards. These fire companies, in towns across America, are being asked to respond to emergency calls involving hazardous materials, structural fire suppression, search and rescue, natural disasters, wild land fires, emergency medical services, and terrorism.

Many of these emergencies occur at federal facilities and buildings and on federal lands. In addition, these incidents can damage America's critical infrastructure, including our interstate highways, railroads, bridges, tunnels, financial centers, power plants, refineries, and chemical manufacturing and storage facilities. We as a fire service are sworn to protect these critical facilities and infrastructure.

In these difficult times, while volunteer fire departments are already struggling to handle their own needs and finances, they are now forced to provide more services. Often, local governments are unable to afford the extensive training and specialized equipment that these activities require.

The funding problems in America's volunteer fire service are not just limited to rural areas. As suburbs continue to grow, so does the burden on the local fire and EMS department. Even though many of these departments have the essentials, they are unable to gain access to new technologies. At no other time have advances been greater in equipment to protect them and make their jobs safer. Yet because the newer technology is so expensive, many volunteer fire departments are forced to forgo the purchase of the new technology or use outdated equipment.

Long before the terrorist attacks of September 11th, the national fire service organizations jointly began working together to improve readiness and increase funding levels for programs related to America's fire departments. Unfortunately, it takes a horrible tragedy for America to fully appreciate the risks our firefighters and EMS personnel take on a daily basis and the level to which they need to be prepared. In the past, the federal government has not made America's fire service a priority. We hope that the tragic and unforgettable events of September 11th will change this attitude and position forever.

The following items are some of the immediate needs of America's fire service to enable it to be prepared for future disasters.

First and foremost, Congress must substantially increase funding for the **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program**. Last year, Congress took a giant step in addressing the needs of America's fire service by creating this grant program and funding it at the \$100 million level. Every fire department across the country is eligible for funding for safety and firefighting equipment, apparatus, training, prevention, wellness and fitness programs, and staffing. Although the \$100 million was a starting point, it is felt that this initiative, although greatly appreciated, fell short of the needs of the fire service. Over 30,000 grant applications were submitted to FEMA, totaling approximately

\$3 billion.

Last week the Senate passed an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill increasing the program's authorization to \$600 million in FY 2002, \$800 million in FY 2003, and \$1 billion in FY 2004. We respectfully request that Congress should immediately fund this program at \$600 million for FY 2002 and commit to fully funding this program in future years.

Another major problem in the fire service is the **personnel shortfall** plaguing both the volunteer and career ranks. In the volunteer fire service, major factors contributing to the problem of recruiting and retaining volunteers include constant fundraising demands, increase in emergency calls, more rigorous training standards, and people working further away from the communities in which they live. Therefore any staffing initiative undertaken by Congress must include a recruitment and retention component to account for the over 90% of America's communities protected by volunteers.

In addition, as suburbs have continued to grow, so has the burden on the local fire and EMS departments protecting these communities. Many of these departments have gone to combination systems, with career staff complementing the volunteers, often to help with daytime coverage. If Congress creates a program to provide for the hiring of firefighters, these struggling volunteer and combination departments must be a large part of the equation.

Terrorism and hazardous materials training for firefighters is of vital importance. Although we understand the concerns of America's large metropolitan areas, Congress cannot forget smaller communities, whose fire, rescue and EMS personnel also need the basic training to recognize and respond to these incidents. In addition, specialized equipment is needed to protect first responders from hazardous materials and chemical and biological weapons. Congress should also properly fund the **Operation Respond Institute**, whose software provides vital life saving information to emergency responders at hazardous materials transportation incidents and rail passenger accidents.

Finally, America's fire service needs universal access to essential tools for fire, rescue and EMS equipment such as **Thermal Imaging Cameras** and **Automated External Defibrillators** (AEDs). Thermal imaging cameras are used to find unconscious victims and trapped or disoriented firefighters, and to pinpoint hot spots. AEDs are crucial to emergency medical response we provide to our residents and protecting our firefighters. 220,000 Americans die each year from sudden cardiac arrest and for every minute without defibrillation the survival rate decreases 10%.

When I began my testimony today, I stated that the volunteer fire service is in need of your assistance and that you, as Members of Congress, could make a difference with the necessary funding. I hope that I have painted a picture that illustrates that the need is real, that the moneys do go a long way, and that the support of the fire service by Congress is indeed a national concern. This is why we have given you our personal 911 call.

I alluded earlier to military actions taken this past Sunday. Just prior to the initiation of this action, President Bush, Senators Mikulski and Sarbanes, along with other Member of Congress and approximately 5,000 fire service peers attended the annual National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service sponsored by the

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, MD. At this service we collectively honored the memory of the 101 members of the career and volunteer fire service who lost their lives in the line of duty in 2000. Delaware, unfortunately, offered one of it's own to this touching Memorial Service. I personally participated in supporting this Delaware fire department, and the spouse of our firefighter who was lost to this tragedy. I vowed to myself that if I could do anything to avoid repeating this heart breaking, gut wrenching tragedy, I would do everything in my power, training, and experience to avoid a future event of this magnitude.

The death of a firefighter, EMS provider, rescue technician, or a police officer is a tragedy. Investigations begin immediately following the incident, local and federal investigations are convened and finding offered. Lessons learned are shared throughout the public safety organizations and departments on a nationwide basis.

Collectively, every heart is with the firefighters, EMS providers, rescue technicians and police officers, along with their families, who made the ultimate sacrifice of saving others lives while giving up his or her own. I was personally acquainted with approximately forty of the members of the "Bravest," at FDNY. I sent instructors to New York City who provided specialized training to the Haz Mat units and squad companies for chemical protective clothing specifically obtained in the event of a WMD event. The instructors, whom were firefighters from Delaware, indicated that the FDNY members were extremely interested, courteous, and above all, Firefighters. They wanted to protect themselves while providing service for others. They enjoyed the training, and kidded among themselves and the instructors. When the class finished, the FDNY personnel invited the instructors to come back to visit.

Unfortunately, some of us went back. Not to visit, but to support the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Family support Sector located in New York. The sector supported FDNY, the Unions for the firefighters and officers of FDNY in taking care of their own and their survivors. When I left New York, I likewise promised myself that I would do anything humanely possible to prevent this senseless tragedy from occurring again. This is my personal 911 call to you and your Committee members, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the committee for your time and the privilege of allowing the views of America's volunteer fire service to be documented and publicized. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.